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Description of the Battle of Orakau

Hitiri Te Paerata

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DESCRIPTION

BATTLE OF ORAKAU

AS GIVEN BY THE NATIVE CHIEF

HITIRI TE PAERATA,

OF THE

NGATIRAUKAWA TRIBE,

At the Parliamentary Buildings, 4th August, 1888.

INTERPRETER – CAPT. GILBERT MAIR .

WELLINGTON

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AS GIVEN BY THE NATIVE CHIEF HITIRI TE PAERATA, NGATIRAUKAWA TRIBE.

[NOTE. – Orakau is situated in the Waikato District, near Kihikihi. The battle was fought on the 31st March, 1st and 2nd April, 1864. The Imperial and Colonial troops numbered 1,700, and were under the command of Brigadier-General Carey. The Maoris numbered 300, including women and children.]

HITIRI TE PAERATA. – I feel somewhat confused and embarrassed, having to meet all these members of Parliament and ladies, more especially as we were defeated at the fight you now ask me to give you an account of; but, if it will please you, I will endeavour to do so.

I will first explain the causes which led to the King movement, and the subsequent fighting which culminated at Orakau. For some years previously the Maori people had been getting more and more dissatisfied at the manner in which their ancestral lands, their one great possession, had been passing away, partly on account of the Government land purchases – the purchasing of the land for fish-hooks, tobacco, and hatchets; then the chiefs were angry because their mana was not sufficiently recog-

nised; also, the selling by chiefs of the lands belonging to the people. The Maoris then determined, on the advice of Tamihana Tarapipi, to set up a head whose mana was to overshadow the land and protect it. Te Wherowhero Potatau was accordingly made King, and many tribes gave the keeping of their bodies and their lands into his hands. As you all know, this led to fighting, first at Taranaki, then in Waikato, the East Coast, and other places.

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After many fights, in which the Europeans were generally successful – for they had numbers and other advantages on their side, whereas the Maoris are a foolish people – we assembled in the vicinity of Orakau. My own tribe was commanded by my father, Te Paerata; my brother, Hone Teri te Paerata; and my uncle, Rawiri te Hirawe. The Urewera contingent was headed by Te Whenuanui and Hapurona Kohi; the East Coast Natives were led by Te Waru, Tamatea, and Raharuhi; and the Ngatimaniapoto by Rewi Manga Maniapoto.

The old men had selected a site for a pa in a very strong position – a tongue of land on Mr. Cowan's farm, running into a deep swamp. Our first intention was to remain concealed till our defences were completed; but some of the hotheaded young men strayed away against orders, and some were killed at Rangiaohia and at another place. Our hearts were very dark on

account of those young men being killed, and the old men were angry. It was my old father, Te Paerata, who said, "Me mate au kikonei [Let us make the pa here; let me die here on the land]."

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It was owing to the disobedience of others, and the dissensions amongst us, that this place was selected, for it was not a suitable place at all. However, we commenced to build our pa at Orakau; but some European troopers saw us, and gave the alarm. The General at once made preparations for attacking, and, after marching all night, took up a position about a mile from where we were at work, to wait for the main body to come up. Just as morning broke the troops were all collected, and advanced to surround our position, which was a sort of oblong redoubt, built of sods. It was about a chain and a half long and a chain wide, and was built in a peach-grove. There was a sort of outwork or flanking angle at one end. We had worked all night, but the pa was not completed when the troops attacked us. They attempted to take the pa by a rush; but my father had placed the men, some in the ditch and others leaning over the earthworks, so when the attacking party got within a short distance we fired tremendous volleys, which made them fall back, leaving their dead and wounded. They then attacked on another side, and were again repulsed. My father

and other brave men urged that we should take advantage of the confusion the Europeans were in and attack them.

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It is an old saying of our fighting men, "Taka mua, taka muri [Quick to strike and quick to retire]." Rewi would not consent, and the supreme lucky moment was lost. The Europeans again attacked, and were repulsed for the third time. They then appeared to lose all hope of taking the place by assault, and determined to take it by first surrounding us and then sapping up to the pa. Our retreat was now quite cut off. We had no water nor anything to eat except potatoes, which we ate raw to quench our thirst, which was very severe.

For three days and three nights we were in this state, during which time a storm of shot was poured into our fort; but we returned the fire, and dug holes to shelter the women, and did all we could to strengthen our defences. By this time the sap had approached to within half a chain of our works, but we kept up such a hot fire that many of the men digging it were killed or wounded.

Up to this time our losses had been very small, and we were sustained by the recital of the brave deeds of our ancestors, whose motto was, "Me mate te tangata, me mate mo te whenua [The warrior's death is to die for the land]." We felt no fear, for our hearts were filled with

fury. Our ammunition now began to fail; we had no bullets, so we fired peach-stones and plugs of wood as a substitute. Our sufferings became very great from hunger and thirst.

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About mid-day on the third day the sap was quite close to our pa, and the troops lighted small shells [hand-grenades], and threw them into our midst. Some burst, killing and wounding those near; others we picked up and threw back, bursting in the sap. The General decided to send a summons calling upon us to surrender. Major Mair was sent by the General to bring us this message. He came up to within a few yards of where we were, our men all aiming at him with their guns, and said, "Let the fighting cease, because you are surrounded. Your position is hopeless. If you persist in fighting you will all be killed, and your women and children will die with you." This word was sent round, and all the chiefs and people within the pa took counsel on the General's message. The Urewera proposed that we should hoist a white flag, and when all the troops came up close to our fort and demanded our arms to pour a tremendous volley in and then charge through. We would not agree to such treachery, because this was not after the manner of chiefs. What we proposed was that the troops should go away with all their dead and wounded, and that we also would go away with ours.

These negotiations lasted about half an hour before our ultimatum had been decided upon. Then the General again sent Major Mair, who said, "Let the women and children be sent out; we will protect them, so that they may not die." Then uprose my sister, Ahumai, amongst the women, and said, "If our husbands and brothers are to die of what profit is it to us that we should live? Let us die with the men." Seeing that the women were all of one mind, then Hapurona, Rewi, and my father said, "Ake, ake, ake [We will fight on for ever]." The people repeated these words with a great shout, and one of my people named Wereta fired at

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Major Mair, hitting him on the top of the right shoulder. Of course, this treacherous work broke off the negotiations, and firing commenced on both sides more furiously than ever, only we had no bullets. A big gun was then put in the sap, which broke down our pa and made a breach through which the troops tried to enter, but we drove them back, killing their leader, Captain Hereford.

Our position became so desperate that we determined to try and break through; so we put our last bullets in our guns, and, forming up in a solid body with the women in our midst, we made one rush, breaking down the pa, and marched out, firing from both flanks at the besiegers, who closed in round our rear and tried

to cut off our retreat. We burst out on the southward side and marched down the hill, breaking through and killing a lot of the soldiers who tried to stop us. As we were leaving the pa I saw one of our men crouching down, holding his gun as if about to fire at the enemy. I found that he was quite dead, so I took the gun, feeling that if I had that I would be a match for any man who tried to stop me. I also bethought me of some blankets wherewith to keep myself warm at night, so I ran back and picked up a bundle. No stragglers were left behind, and the fight became desperate and hand to hand.

I had a presentiment that I would escape, but when I looked back and considered the odds we had to fight against, and saw the Europeans marching after us in their majesty and might, then I said to my companions, "Oh, foolish people to dare to strive against the white man, the offspring of 'Tiki,' the heaven-born sons of giants." As we fled before them, they tried, by outmarching on our flanks, to cut off our retreat, and poured a storm of bullets which seemed to encircle us like hail. It became as a forlorn hope with us; none expected to escape, nor did we desire to; were we not all the children of one parent? therefore we all wished to die together. My father and many of my people died in breaking away from the pa. When we cut

through the troops further on my brother, Hone Teri, who was with Rewi, died in endeavouring to shield him. The whole of my tribe were slain; my father, brothers, and uncle all died. My sister Ahumai, she who said the men and women would all die together, was wounded in four places. She was shot in the right side, the bullet going through her body and coming out on the left; she was shot right through the shoulder, the bullet coming out at her back; she was also shot through the waist; and her left thumb was shot away. Yet she is still alive, and resides at Taupo. We bore away many of our wounded.

Not half of the defenders of the Orakau Pa escaped. I saw as we got away from the Puniu River a young man of the Ngatimaniapoto Tribe leading off two old men, one of whom was badly wounded. He was hard pressed by the troops, and kept kneeling down and pointing his gun at the pursuers, but it was not loaded, and eventually he was shot; also one of the old men, the other escaped into the woods.

None of the men in the pa showed any fear. All were equally brave, but the most intrepid in fight and sagacious in council were Hapurona, Raureti te Huia, Rewi's brother, and my brother, Honi Teri te Paerata.

It was from the small, flanking angle that Wereta fired at and nearly shot Major Mair.

We afterwards beard that when the pa was carried Major Mair went in with the stormers to look after the wounded. He found some soldiers trying to kill a wounded woman named Hineiturama, belonging to Rotorua. They did not know, perhaps, that she was a woman, but they were enraged at the death of their officer, Captain Ring. Major Mair carried the woman to a corner of the pa, and ran off to save another woman called Ariana, who was also badly wounded, but when he returned Hineiturama had been killed. I mention this to show that some of the Europeans were kind to us. It is on this account that the Waikato and Taupo Natives have an affection for Major Mair.

Before Orakau I took part in the fights at Rangiaohia and Paterangi. The fight at the bathing-place at Waiari was caused through the jealousy between the Ngatimaniapoto and Ngatiraukawa. The Ngatiraukawa had been successful in a fight some time previously, and this made the Ngatimaniapoto anxious to eclipse them; hence their attack on the bathing-party, where they lost thirty-five killed. The Maoris had collected large quantities of ammunition years previously, not with the intention of fighting against the Europeans, but to protect our land in case we were attacked by other tribes, as there had been a number of fights between other tribes over the land not long before.

My own tribe, the Ngatiraukawa, and the Ngatimaniapoto would have been very sorrowful indeed if the Government had given the site of Orakau, with all our dead, to Te Kooti. We were very thankful that Mr. Bryce prevented this being done.

When we were hemmed in at Orakau some of the wounded were crying for water, and I ran to the swamp with a calabash to get some. I passed right through the soldiers. Perhaps they knew what I wanted the water for, for they did not fire at me.

In answer to a question as to his age, Paerata spoke of a fight near Otaki, at Horowhenua, in 1830, and said he was born some time before that. He added: "I am about sixty-six, I think, but I fully intend to live another sixty-six years."

During the fight at Orakau a son of Raharuhi showed great courage; but after shooting one of the soldiers he became so elated that he jumped up on the bank, and was shot through the heart. Another man, called Aporo, kept standing up on the parapet, every now and then calling out, "The sky is clear towards the east, but dark on the west and south." He wished to convey to those Natives outside that the side towards the east was not so well protected by the Europeans, and encouraging the Natives to try and make a diversion in our favour on that side.

Te Heuheu, Te Huiatahi, and a small party came as near to us as they could, but were fired at by the big guns. They sat on the hill and wept their farewell, for they thought that we would none of us escape. Te Heuheu, with a few followers, tried to come to our assistance, but were kept back by the others, who said it was useless to go to certain death.

HITIRI TE PAERATA gave the following account of the saving of Mr. Buckland's life at Tututawa:—

I was living away in the Hauhau country, and Mr. Buckland, with a Native companion, came to pay me a visit. He came into my house, leaving the horses outside. When the Hauhaus saw Mr. Buckland had arrived they seized his horses immediately. I kept Mr. Buckland in my house during the night, and at daybreak in the morning I was aroused by hearing shouting and yelling and a trampling of feet outside. I opened the door and looked out, and found a great number of men rushing about with tomahawks and weapons in their hands. I went and stood in the doorway, because they were trying to get past into the house to kill Mr. Buckland. I told these people that according to Maori custom they had made a great mistake; they had laid their hands on the horses and saddles and left the real object to the last, and according to Maori custom that was a very bad

omen. I told them to be off, to go away; that it was a cowardly, treacherous thing to kill a defenceless stranger, a man who had come unarmed, and accepted their hospitality. I told them to go away, and they did so. They put away their weapons and dispersed, after sending back the horses. I then said I would take Mr.

Buckland back to Cambridge. They tried to prevent me from going with Mr. Buckland, because they knew that Purukutu and a number of Waikatos, who were some distance off in ambush, would kill him if I did not go. However, I insisted upon going, and went. I took Mr. Buckland right back to Cambridge, and found Mr. Mackay there, and warned him that the Natives intended to commit more murders; and almost while I was speaking Purukutu murdered the European Sullivan at Rotorangi. When I got back to my settlement I found the head of the European had been cut off and brought there. I reminded Mr. Buckland that if ever I was in trouble he should stand by me and do me as good a turn as I had done him, and he promised to do so, but he died.

GENEALOGICAL TABLE, HITIRI TE PAERATA.

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[Names from the whakapapa: Arawa Canoe, Homaitawhiti, Tamatekapua, Kahu I, Kahumatamomoe, Tawakemoetahanga, Rangitihi, Tuhourangi, Uenukukopako, Waitapu, Hinerehu, Te Kahureremoa, Waitapu, Parekawa [f], Tainui Canoe, [m] Hoturoa, [m] Hotuope, [m] Hotumatapu, [m] Motai, [m] Oue, [m] Raka, [m] Kakati, [m] Tawhao, [m] Turongo, [m] Raukawa, [m] Takihihi, [m] Wairangi, [m] Hingatera [m] Parata Kaihae, [m] Ngahianga, [m] Te Kohera, [m] Pakake, [m] Ngamotu, [m] Rongonui, [m] Te Paerata, Tutahi, Ranginomia, Arita Parerape, [m] Hitiri te Paerata, Ria te Haukoraki, Hoani Taipua, Arawa Canoe, Tia, Tapuika, Makahae, Whatukoro, Pongare, Tauatawaka, Tawakeihe, Marukohaki, Ruangutu, Ngakohua, Parewhete [f], Hinepare, Te Momoirawaru, Hore, Te Akanui, Kawhia, Manga Rewi]

NOTE. — The marriage of Wairangi and Parewhete, and Parekawa and Ngahianga, make Hitiri a descendant of the three great chiefs Hoturoa, Homaitawhiti, and Tia.

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